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ICC APPROVES PLAN FOR CUSTOMER CREDITS FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS

The Illinois Commerce Commission voted unanimously today to adopt an emergency rule implementing consumer credits for Illinois telecommunications customers, who have problems getting telephone service installed or restored after an outage.

The new rule, effective on August 1, require Illinois telecommunications companies to provide customers with credits to their bills when service is interrupted for more than 24 hours, or not installed within the standard five business days.

This spring the General Assembly enacted and Governor George H. Ryan signed into law House Bill 2900, a new telecommunications act that provides customers with a number of immediate and automatic remedies when they encounter telecommunication service problems.

Specifically, the new rule, drawn directly from the language of Public Act 92-0022, states that if a telecommunications carrier fails to repair basic local service within 24 hours, the carrier shall provide a credit to the customer. If the service disruption is for 48 hours, for example, the customer would have his account credited for a portion of the time out of service. If the outage lasts more than five days, the customer would be credited the full month's service and, also, offered the choice of either an alternative telecommunications service without charge or an additional \$20 credit to his account per day.

If a carrier fails to install basic service within the standard five business days, the carrier must waive 50 percent of the installation charge, or if installation is delayed by ten business days, the customer must receive a full credit. The rule also provides that if a carrier fails to keep a scheduled repair or installation appointment, when the customer is required to be there, the company must credit the customer \$50 for each missed appointment.

The provisions of the emergency rule will remain in place, while the ICC, telecommunications carriers and interested citizens and industry groups work to develop permanent rules that improve customer remedies when customers experience poor telecommunications service quality. The rule also will be subject to review by the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules.

Commissioner Ed Hurley noted, and Commissioner Ruth Kretschmer agreed, that legislators stated clearly that they wished customers to receive the credits or payments for service problems sooner rather than later.

“We came away with the clear impression that this is something they want done now,” Kretschmer said. “We will need the cooperation of all of the companies when we create the permanent rules.”

Commissioner Terry Harvill pointed out that companies that provide adequate service won’t need to pay credits.

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